
News Release

U.S. Senators Jeff Bingaman & Pete Domenici

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FEMA AGREES TO PAY FOR LOS ALAMOS FIRE DEBRIS REMOVAL

Bingaman and Domenici had Individually Raised the Issue With FEMA

WASHINGTON -- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Director James Lee Witt today informed New Mexico Senators Jeff Bingaman and Pete Domenici that he would honor the Senators' requests for the agency to fund a coordinated debris removal project in the wake of the Cerro Grande Fire that burned hundreds of homes in Los Alamos. County officials have been attempting to create such a coordinated effort, but lacked the \$14 million necessary to launch the effort.

"In my opinion, the debris poses a direct health and safety issue to a large portion of the population," Bingaman said. "The way I read FEMA's regulations, those issues grant the Director authority to assist in the removal efforts. I'm glad we were able to make a persuasive case to FEMA on behalf of Los Alamos."

"I want to thank Director Witt for his quick response to the concerns I raised with him in my office on Monday," Domenici said. "The County had voiced concerns with financing the removal of this fire debris, which is one of the first tasks that must be completed in the recovery process."

Los Alamos County is seeking a coordinated and efficient effort to remove remaining debris from burned home sites. It was feared that individual property owners would be unable to efficiently remove the debris in a time line for quick recovery without a coordinated effort.

After meeting with Bingaman in Washington on Wednesday, Witt contacted the New Mexico FEMA coordinator and determined that authority existed to address the debris as a health risk. New Mexico State Health Department officials confirmed for FEMA that they believed the debris posed a public health risk. Domenici also raised the issue with Witt in a meeting earlier this week.

"I understand that FEMA will let the contract to take care of debris removal under their existing authority," Bingaman said. "Since Los Alamos County has already put a contract out for bid, we have a good understanding of what is required in that process and how much it should cost."

The coordinated approach to debris removal has been preferred by local leaders because it would allow for more expedient removal of hazardous materials and allow for quicker rebuilding of lost structures.